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SUBJECT: Australian Counterterrorism Ambassador on Progress,
Prospects

MELBOURNE 00000141 001.2 OF 002

REF:

Summary

¶ 1. (SBU) During a November 26 address, Australia's Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism, Bill Paterson indicated that his country would maintain its focus on Southeast Asia by stepping up operational capacity there. Recounting his recent visit to the United States, Paterson said he had been struck by the persistent U.S. concern of another domestic terrorist attack as well as the increased attention on northwest Pakistan as "terror central." He assessed that al-Qaida remains a challenge due to the expansion of sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas. Paterson did not indicate any reduced support of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, but was careful to indicate that Australia is assuming a greater role in its own backyard. End Summary.

Australia and Counterterrorism

¶ 12. (SBU) Speaking to Monash University's annual "Radicalization Crossing Borders" conference on November 26, Australia's Ambassador for Counter-Terrorism, Bill Paterson said that his country will remain focused on Southeast Asia. Australia will step up efforts to improve customs and border security programs and will continue to track the financial flows of terrorist organizations. Based on its experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, Australia will expand and improve upon its anti improvised explosive device (IED) technology. In addition to pursuing education reform in Southeast Asian madrasas, Australia will promote interfaith dialogue and prison reform. Paterson acknowledged that "significant vulnerabilities" remain, but did not elaborate further on the topic.

¶ 13. (SBU) Commenting on his recent visit to Washington, Paterson said that he was struck by a persistent U.S. fear of another terrorist attack on the homeland. He also noted the increased emphasis the USG is placing on northwest Pakistan as "terror central." He speculated that President-elect Obama might change some of the "language" around terrorism - such as the Global War on Terror - but the Obama administration will likely maintain a focus on counterterrorism efforts. He expects the Obama administration to continue to move the U.S. counterterrorism strategy from kinetic (military) operations to a "whole of government" approach.

Assessment of al-Qaida

¶ 14. (SBU) Paterson said that al-Qaida has undergone a paradigm shift. The organization is "transnational, franchised, and underpinned by a shared ideology based on a warped view of Islam." He stated that al-Qaida is "under pressure," but likely to remain a challenge as it

represents a model others may follow. While al-Qaida's operational capacity has been reduced in the years following 2001, it has recently begun to "regenerate" due to new sanctuaries found in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

¶5. (SBU) According to Paterson, a geographic base has been critical for al-Qaida, allowing it to attract funding and new recruits. Outside of this new base, al-Qaida remains a "coherent, small group" with Bin Laden and Zawahiri still at the organization's apex. He stated that some local terrorist groups operate in al-Qaida's name, but sometimes work at counter purposes with al-Qaida by pursuing unrelated, local and divergent goals. Paterson said that obtaining new technologies to inflict mass casualties remains a key al-Qaida objective.

Once Around the World

¶6. (SBU) Al-Qaida in Iraq remains the largest and most capable franchise. Paterson said that although Sunni groups have degraded some of al-Qaida's effectiveness, the organization still retains influence in northern parts of the country. Muslims in the Maghreb and throughout Africa are "pushing back" against the use of violence. In the southern Philippines and Thailand, extremists remain entrenched, though local rather than transnational concerns motivate these groups. Jamaat Islamiah is "weakened" and the group has returned to its proselytizing.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) While Ambassador Paterson did not make any ground-breaking counterterrorism policy announcements during his November 26 address, his emphasis on Australia's growing role in Southeast Asia

MELBOURNE 00000141 002.2 OF 002

are instructive. At no time did Paterson indicate a diminished role in supporting key U.S. foreign policy objectives, but Australia's interest in policing its own backyard is becoming more pronounced.

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